

2
CONJECTURES

UPON THE

MORTALITY

OF THE

HUMAN SOUL.

BY A FREE-THINKER.

W

LONDON:

Printed for J. Wilkie, No 71. St. Paul's Church-Yard.

MDCCCLXXVIII.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

DATE

TO : MR. TOLSON



FROM : MR. [illegible]

SUBJECT : [illegible]
[illegible]

CONJECTURES
UPON THE
Mortality of the Human Soul.
BY A FREE-THINKER.

INTRODUCTION.

AS that inestimable blessing Liberty, has at last, in this happy land, so far attained its highest point of perfection, that any one may with the utmost safety talk, or write, or print, whatever he pleases; I am not afraid to offer to the public a few free thoughts upon a subject, which is by some reckoned of all others the

B

most

most important and interesting to the race of mankind: regardless at the same time of whatever consequences may ensue from them upon human society. For, as is the case with most scribbling coxcombs, I prefer my own honour and glory to every other consideration; though I am perhaps the only one amongst them that has ingenuity enough to own it.

But——my hand shakes,——my heart fails me,——something within checks me from letting fly my fatal blunderbuss amongst the most worthy and respectable, as well as the vilest and most contemptible crowd. If I could divest myself of all regard for them, I should tremble for my own disgrace and danger: as

from

5

B

it



it might either miss fire, and I do not much like to be laughed at; or recoil and give me a villanous box on the ear; or burst and shatter my hand to pieces. Besides, there are some catastrophes in nature and human life, so awful, that one who is not quite callous, would rather not be concerned in them.—Oh! It is dreadful to behold the sad noddings, the mortal agonies of a noble primæval tree, under the humiliating blows of the unfeeling woodman's axe!—And I could not find in my heart to give the *coup de grace* to an ancient opinion, which at least never did any harm. If I could demonstrate this old, this almost universal opinion to be false (WHICH IS IMPOSSIBLE) I would not: because

B 2

I should

I should be sorry to rob the best and worthiest of mankind of a pleasing delusion. They should never have cause to complain of me, as the Athenian did of his friends upon his recovery from a most enchanting state of madness, that *they had killed, not saved him.*

As I had always reckoned the immortality of the soul a truth not to be doubted; I never thought of paying any particular attention to the subject, till lately, that there happened to fall in my way a dissertation, in which it is treated as something quite incredible, if not absurd. But so far from finding any thing persuasive in the author's arguments against it, the more I think upon the subject,

subject, the more I am confirmed in my original opinion.

That a wretch whose life, in spite of that watchful and unerring monitor, his own conscience, is spotted with crimes, should at last wish to sneak out of the way of just punishment into a state of eternal insensibility, is no great wonder. But what comfort any honest inoffensive creature can find in the idea of annihilation is not so easily explained,—except you suppose him too indolent to support the fatigue of living, and of keeping himself awake.—But that is not quite the case neither. —A particular kind of vanity with which some people are stung, must be gratified.—For you must know,
that

that when a man of parts,——not much superior to those of a block-head,——takes it into his head to be a wit,——he is apt to turn out an absurd, disagreeable, and sometimes shallow as you may think him, a very dangerous fellow in one shape or another. For according to his original *stamina*, the constitution with which he was born, he starts up either a pert impertinent jackanapes; or takes to writing your blunt unmannerly abuse which he and his friends call satire; or instructs the public as critic upon subjects of which he has not the least knowledge or taste; or steps out a Deist, or perhaps an Atheist. For you must know again, that nothing so tickles some little tittering fools, who are always
fond

fond of what they call a joke, as an indecent burlesque familiarity with subjects the most serious and sacred. This kind of wit is within the reach of every impudent profligate buffoon; but amongst such people of *real* wit, as I have by chance had the honour to be acquainted with, I am not able to recollect one that ever dealt in jokes of this kind.

From what I have said, I would not be supposed to mean that all Deists are blockheads. But it is no specimen of a man's good sense, publicly to declare himself an unbeliever in the most important, and what one would think to every honest mind, the most comfortable of all truths. And if it is true, that a late right
honourable

honourable philosopher boasted, that by publishing some licentious doctrines, he had broke one of the chains which kept the wild beast Man under command, he fairly owned and declared himself guilty of nothing less than high treason against human society. But to despise the admiration of fools, and not even to court it, requires more dignity of mind, than many who have passed for great men have ever possessed.

For my part, I take all philosophical opinions to be false, as well as all acts of government to be impolitic, that tend to the detriment of society,—of the people. And upon considering this most pernicious opinion,

I shall

I shall be glad to contribute my mite towards exposing its falsity.

The little I have read upon either side of the question has been entirely accidental; and of that little there is hardly any thing I can recollect. So that I engage in this subject without any arms, but those of plain common sense. For it is nonsense to quote scripture to those wags who laugh at revelation; and I have no more to say to an Atheist, than to any philosopher of Bedlam or St. Luke's.

SECTION II.

LITTLE as I know of logic, a science which I have always, but per-
C haps

haps unjustly despised, I am going to set out upon my *conjectures* with what I think they call a syllogism.—The grand and proper object of all philosophical enquiry is truth. The truth is always salutary, and at least never dangerous.—But the doctrine of the soul's mortality is extremely dangerous, and its tendency to the last degree pernicious to society,—therefore it is not true.

Does the prosperity and happiness of human society depend chiefly upon the belief of a future state? If it does, is it worthy of God that the happiness of mankind should be built upon a lie? Impossible!—Surely it is infinitely unworthy of God to practise even what they call a *pious fraud* upon
his

his creatures. The Almighty and all-wise Creator could never be reduced to any such disingenuous necessity. That the happiness of human society should owe its chief support to a delusion, is accusing God of fraud and imposture:—an imposture equally needless and cruel; as the Omnipotent could doubtless have made man as moral an animal as he is, and as fit for all the duties of society, without either hopes or wishes of a world to come,

If I do not flatter myself, these few short reflections are almost decisive in favour of the soul's immortality. But as different minds are struck by different arguments, and as an opinion of such moment deserves every

support against the attacks of the infidel philosophers, it may be expected that some other arguments should be produced in its favour.

SECTION III.

IN the first place, it certainly contributes something, and not a little to its credit, that it has for ever been, according to the best accounts, an universal opinion; even amongst nations that could not have received it from any neighbours.

SECTION IV.

IT is something too in favour of this opinion, that the wisest men of all nations and ages have agreed in it,——

it,—except indeed *****
God rest his soul! Messieurs *****
 and ***** But these au-
 thorities are rather too recent to have
 as yet their full effect. In what
 oracular veneration they may be
 held two or three thousand years
 hence, when they will be to the
 children of that advanced æra, what
 Pythagoras, Solon, and Socrates are
 to ~~us~~ is nothing to us.

The present Generation

SECTION V.

IT would be both tedious and un-
 necessary to enlarge upon these old
 arguments; as they speak for them-
 selves. But now, in pursuing my
 subject, I find myself upon the brink
 of a difficult pass,—a dark and intri-

cate road,—into the land of spirits. That there is such a land admits of no doubt. The world was created by an *Almighty Spirit*. And as this earth teems with animals great and small, it is natural from analogy to suppose, that the universe swarms with spirits of various kinds, orders, and degrees; though it is impossible for us, in our present situation, to have the least idea of their mode of existence. To guess at things unknown by those we know, it is natural to suppose that those spirits are good or bad, happy or miserable. And that, from the self-evident benignity of God, who delights in communicating happiness and pleasure, there are spirits capable of enjoying the most magnificent appearances, and stupendous

stupendous scenes of nature; such as the rapid motions of those prodigious bodies the planets; and can amuse themselves with the various grand objects, the plains, mountains, rivers, seas, and cities, that diversify their different surfaces, as familiarly as our geographers with the terrestrial globe. To this world of spirits man naturally aspires; and surely there is no absurdity in supposing that the world to us at present invisible, and unperceivable by our organs of flesh and blood, may at least partly be supplied by emigrants from this.

I am naturally much more disposed to scepticism than to credulity upon all subjects, from the most serious

rious and interesting points of history, down to those wandering vapours, the reports of the town, whether political or scandalous. Yet I cannot help believing that there is some connection and relationship between the human race and a world of spirits, who know much more of us than we of them; but for wise reasons are not permitted to interfere in human affairs, any farther than perhaps in sometimes giving us little glimpses of another state.

Though I am sorry never yet to have seen what people call an *apparition*; I cannot with all my scepticism, refuse some credit to several remarkable instances of this kind, related by writers both ancient and modern,

modern of the most indisputed veracity: who at the same time could have no interest in favouring or propagating any superstitious lies. Some recent stories too of the same kind, so circumstantially attested by people, not at all remarkable for any religious enthusiasm, have fallen in my way; that I reproach myself for not having paid at least as much attention to them, as your collectors of news I suppose do to the authors of *their* intelligence.

At the same time I regret my own indolence and inattention, in having neglected some strong instances of what they call the *second sight* in the north of Scotland, related as certain facts by some who rather affected to

D

be

be thought unbelievers. And here I cannot help observing, that Homer seems to have had some idea of this strange faculty. For in the *Odyſſey*, juſt before that terrible ſcene opens, in which the ſlaughter of the ſuitors is repreſented, one of the company in an alarming fright tells them that he ſees all their ghoſts gliding out of the room, one after another.

There are many remarkable inſtances upon record of propheſies and predictions fulfilled,—of ominous impreſſions and prepoſſeſſions,—of ominous dreams,—of dreams announcing fatal events at the diſtance of many hundred leagues, the very inſtant as far as could be traced that they happened. Theſe, and
other

other unaccountable intimations of a similar nature, seem to signify a connection between mankind and a world of spirits. And though the spirits with which the Italian poet Tasso was sometimes haunted, seem to have been the creatures of an unsound imagination; I find myself somewhat inclined to give a little credit to the genius, the daemon or familiar of Socrates; who was too wise a man to impose upon himself, and too honest to impose upon others,

It is not, I conceive, quite foreign to the present purpose to mention a phenomenon, which has not hitherto, as far as I know, attracted the attention of any philosopher. Several

years ago I called upon a friend who had been suddenly taken ill, and was just going to lose blood at the arm. The blood had not sprung long when he fainted away; but on coming to himself again, he told us he had been in such a charming scene, and surrounded with such delightful objects, as it was impossible for him to describe. This the surgeon told me frequently happened under that circumstance. Now I own myself too much a sceptic, even to guess whether in those cases the soul is to such a degree detached from the body, as to have a glimpse of the land of spirits;—which is at hand. Though in our present state and situation, we know as little of it as the fishes in the Atlantic or the

the Pacific Ocean, of the plains, mountains, woods, streams, cities, and inhabitants of the different islands and continents they wash,—yet we may presume it is at hand,—it is here,—it is every where.—*Est plubris*. But I must prevent any pert unbeliever from unfairly adding

Animus si te non deficit.—

Meantime it is but fair to take notice of what one may call a counter-phenomenon to this. It has often happened, that a person from having been for some time under water, or from some other accident, apparently dead, and remaining so for a considerable time; when the means that have been used to restore him to life have succeeded, he has
not

not recollected any thing that passed in his mind from the time of the accident, to that of his recovery. This some think favours the opinion of those comfortable philosophers, who doubt of every thing; who, to be consistent with themselves, ought to doubt whether our most pleasing sensations are not really painful; or, what might upon occasion be convenient enough, whether what the unlearned call pain, in fits of the gout or tooth-ach, is not rather an agreeable kind of tickling; and who, to set out regularly upon their system, ought to begin with doubting whether they doubt or no. But if any unbeliever attempts to triumph upon this phenomenon; I must ask his leave to suppose, that the soul requires

quires and enjoys the comforts of sleep—as all spirits do, except the Almighty himself. For the truth of this opinion I appeal to the greatest of all poets, and almost of all philosophers, who says,

The whole race of Gods and men pass the night in sleep,—all but Jupiter himself, who never sleeps.

SECTION VI.

SO much for *conjectures* upon the world of spirits, the affinity and connection between it and the race of mankind. It seems natural in the next place to consider how far the human kind has reason, from its superiority to *the beasts that perish*, to expect a different lot. And to be-

gin with the human form, it is certainly by far the most beautiful that *we* can imagine. The legislator of the Jews, who, it must be owned, had now and then some good notions enough, tells us, that God made man *after his own image.*

As to the faculties and qualities of his mind, they are surely very high. And notwithstanding the monstrous majority of fools; for this class, begging pardon of divers and sundry confounded clever fellows, includes the whole variety of knaves; man is still an animal of great worth and dignity. The powers of his mind are wonderful; his passions, sentiments, and ideas, delicate, generous, heroic, and sublime. In short, he is
fo

so divine a being, that without blasphemy, it may be said, that as far as he is capable of perfection in justice, goodness, and truth, he is not inferior to God himself.

Meantime, a late noble and celebrated philosopher, somewhere in his metaphysical works, most peremptorily affirms, that mankind rank very low in the scale of intellectual beings. God only knows how that is. But if his Lordship means in comparison with the inhabitants of the other planets that belong to our system; I have as good a right to say they rank very high. One would be curious to know in what particular powers, or qualities, these foreign planetarians excel the

E

home-

home-spun breed of this earth. Some of us are so proud of our country as to despise all others, even without ever having seen any other. And why should not we be as proud of our planet? We very safely may, without giving the least offence to such far-distant neighbours; or blundering ourselves into any quarrels, misunderstandings, or heart-burnings with them, upon such impertinent subjects. And really and seriously, when we come to consider it, there is no situation in the solar system that appears more likely to produce every thing excellent than this very terraqueous globe of ours. For it is placed at a moderate distance from the sun, between the two extremes of hot and cold, though a
great

great deal nearer to the hot; and possesses much the same latitude in the solar system, as Greece and the islands of the Archipelago, or rather the Canaries, which the antients dignified with the name of the Fortunate Islands, do here in its own sphere.

SECTION VII.

BUT besides his intellectual powers, man is the only religious animal upon earth; and history they say, affords no instance of any nation without religion. It is indeed doubtful whether any large society could flourish or subsist without it. At least it would be more bold than wise in a legislator to hazard

the experiment. A society of Atheists in my humble opinion, could not long exist; there could be no harmony or good order in it. What is yet more, human nature, I imagine, is so prone to religion, that all the care, *nurture and admonition* of the most active, pains-taking, and vigilant professors of Atheism, would not be able to hinder a large society, for any length of time, from deviating into some kind of religion. You will say, perhaps, that the various systems of religion differ so much from one another, that they cannot all be true. I say they are—as far as they agree in certain fundamental principles; as far as they are all built upon the solid foundation of natural religion. They all agree
in

in the same opinion of what is just and unjust, what is right and wrong. And indeed every human creature that is not quite an idiot, is born a moral philosopher: a sound system of morals is stamped upon the tablet of every human heart. No one ever was guilty of a base, unjust, or cruel action for want of knowing he was doing wrong. The most callous hard-hearted villain has a monitor within that reproaches him, a judge that condemns him, for every crime he commits. And can it ever be a matter of doubt, that man is accountable to God for his actions; and justly punishable whenever he acts contrary to the admonitions of his own conscience?—But we shall know

know more of the * *Almighty Poet's* plan in conducting the great drama of nature, the grand tragi-comedy of the universe, when the next scene opens to our view, than we possibly can in this.

If the human existence terminates with this life, I ask why did God make man a religious animal? To what purpose?—Surely the infinitely wise and good Creator could never intend an unmeaning farce by it. That idea is not only blasphemous, but to the last degree absurd. God could certainly, as was observed before, have made man as moral a creature, and as fit for all the offices

* See Thomson on the Seasons.

and duties of society as he is, without the smallest religious impression, without either hopes or ideas of a future state. And is it reconcilable to the goodness, justice, and truth of God, to have given such hopes and wishes in vain?—to sport with the happiness of his creatures?—The supposition is most shockingly impious and diabolical!—It is no disappointment to *the beasts* that they *perish*;—they never dreamt of either happiness or misery beyond the present hour. But that man, with all his superior powers and faculties, his aspiring wishes and hopes, should lie under the same mortal doom, is in effect most impiously to accuse God of a needless and disingenuous impos-

imposture.—If it is so, what subtle
casuist will undertake

To justify the ways of God to man?

If it be so; it is surely the only in-
stance of an appetite given by the
infinitely wise and good God to dis-
appoint it.

SECTION VIII.

I CANNOT recollect any difficulties
objected to the opinion I have been
at some pains to support, but what
may be removed, by attending to the
intimate connection between soul
and body in their present state. But
I must take some notice of a diffi-
culty which was started many
years ago, by a certain author, who
had

had employed all his metaphysical abilities, the principal use of which it would seem is to confound and puzzle where you cannot convince; in combating the opinion of the soul's immortality. The recollection of this opinion of his is, in truth, what partly induced me to bestow some particular attention upon this subject.

One of these objections, I well remember, which he imagined ought to embarrass the *religious theory*, was the difficulty of finding room for the successive generations of Man; for as we are at liberty, said he, to suppose every planet in every solar system to be peopled with intelligent mortal beings; which is no

F

unrea-

unreasonable supposition; it follows, that either the universe was, at first, created large enough to receive this continual influx of beings, or that a new universe must, in all succeeding generations, have been created to make room for them. A supposition, he added, which ought not to be admitted by any philosophy: and this merely because it was barely possible.

In what manner spirits occupy space, it is impossible for us to conceive: but the apprehension of being crowded and pegged up in the universe seems natural only to a very fat spirit. Milton appears to have had different ideas of spirits. For, from a prodigious elasticity of texture,

ture, it would seem, in the Pandæmonium, the infernal mobility, that there might be no distress for want of elbow-room, contracted themselves from their natural gigantic size, into mere dwarfs; from the size we may suppose of the oriental *Roc*, or the Peruvian *Condor*, who carries off an ox with as much ease as the eagle a hare, to that of a wasp or a gnat. Somewhere else he tells us, that spirits upon certain particular occasions *mix total*. Heaven knows how these things are. Meantime our metaphysician's idea of the universe seems rather narrow, and not worthy of one who aspires at the character of a *free-thinker*. However, it may not be amiss to bestow some attention upon it.

SECTION IX.

THERE are many things impossible to God himself. God could not make it a virtuous or a meritorious action for a man to rob and murder his father, or ravish his sister. God cannot make a white or a green eye a beauty, or a humped back an ornament to the human figure. God cannot make two and two either more or less than four; or a figure that under the same extent of surface shall be more capacious than a sphere. And there is one grand natural impossibility which is perhaps in some degree necessary to the happiness of God himself. I mean the impossibility of ever filling infinite space with worlds. God never can;
not

not suppose he should create a world every week, every day, every hour, every minute, throughout eternity. For the universe has neither walls, nor roof, nor bottom. Meantime creation is never at a stand.—Is it possible that the eternal and inexhaustible fountain of existence should ever cease to flow? That the Almighty spirit who created all those worlds we see,—a Being of infinite energy,—incapable of fatigue,—that never sleeps,—should ever retire from the exercise of his omnipotent powers?—Most certainly no.—*The kingdom of God endureth for ever.*—The states, kingdoms, and empires of this world arrive at last at a certain height which they never can surmount; from which point they

2

all

all tend downwards towards their dissolution. They all die.—Some of a violent acute disease, some of a slow decline, and some of suicide. But *the kingdom of God* not only *endureth for ever*; it is always advancing and improving; for ever increasing in beauty, in grandeur, and from the perpetual increase of happy beings, in felicity. It flourishes in a state of youth and adolescence, that happily is incapable of any end or termination; but will for ever continue fruitful of the most luxuriant beauties, and an endless variety of new, sublime, and delightful wonders.

How far the old created worlds may require from time to time to be repaired, God only knows. This
earth

earth we tread, has, it seems, suffered great revolutions. Whole islands they say, have sunk into the deep; huge mountains have in some violent fits of convulsion shot out of it. And perhaps the *southern continent*, which has of late employed the curiosity of some able navigators, may not for ever lie asleep at the bottom of *the great south sea*.—Mean time, amidst all the alterations that have shook this globe, and the incessant change and transmutation of the principles which compose it, from one shape to another, throughout the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms, one may venture to say, that it has not lost nor gained one particle of matter from its first creation to this present day; and perhaps
 the

the sun pours out as much light and heat now, as he did in the days of Noah.

However these things may be, it is hoped that there is nothing in these *conjectures* inconsistent with our most rational ideas of God and nature; nor any thing that can in the least discompose the faith of the most scrupulous Christian.



I N I S